

# Information obtained from nine road-killed Red-necked Nightjar *Caprimulgus ruficollis* in The Gambia, in winters 1990–1997

Clive R. Barlow and Gordon Gale

Des données sur neuf Engoulevents à collier roux *Caprimulgus ruficollis* de la sous-espèce nominale, tués et ramassés sur les routes de Gambie entre le 14 novembre 1990 et le 12 novembre 1997, sont présentées sous forme de tableau. Les localités où les oiseaux ont été trouvés sont indiquées sur une carte, tandis que des photos illustrent les points d'identification saillants. Ces photos, ainsi que d'autres diapositives traitant du même sujet, sont archivées à l'adresse au Royaume Uni indiquée ci-dessous. Une peau a été déposée au British Natural History Museum, Tring, et plusieurs autres au Museum of Zoology, University of Michigan, USA.

Prior to Barlow *et al*<sup>1</sup> there were no published records of Red-necked Nightjar *Caprimulgus ruficollis* in The Gambia. The species was accepted onto the national list in October 1994 on the basis of a road-kill near Georgetown in Central River Division on 14 November 1990. The specimen is retained at the British Museum (Natural History) at Tring. Three records (two in November and one from January) from northern Senegal involve both the nominate European and paler, greyer *desertorum* race of North Africa<sup>7,8</sup>. The main wintering grounds are considered to be 16–17°N in Mali, where probably both subspecies are common and widespread in November–March<sup>5</sup>. Other West African records are from coastal Mauritania (in May and October–November)<sup>5</sup>; Ghana (one record in March 1901 referred to as (North African) Red-necked Nightjar)<sup>5,6</sup>; Côte d'Ivoire (several recent records in January–March and also November<sup>5,9,10</sup>).

## The Gambian records

Nine dead Red-necked Nightjars were found on roads in three of the five administrative divisions of The Gambia, in November 1990–November 1997. All were found in October–January (with most in November) and were south of the Gambia River (see map). They were photographed while fresh, then frozen when facilities were available before return to Banjul, or sometimes several days later. Specimens were prepared, either as a skin, partial skin or skeleton. Badly damaged corpses had their wings removed, spread and dried. All defrosted and bruised birds proved difficult to prepare as skins.

Basic biometric data were recorded when relevant mensural equipment was available in the field. Some individuals were found with the tail missing. (One bird (Specimen C) was photographed, but the partial skin was stolen by a cat while being sun-dried at a river camp.) Based on plumage characteristics<sup>4</sup>,

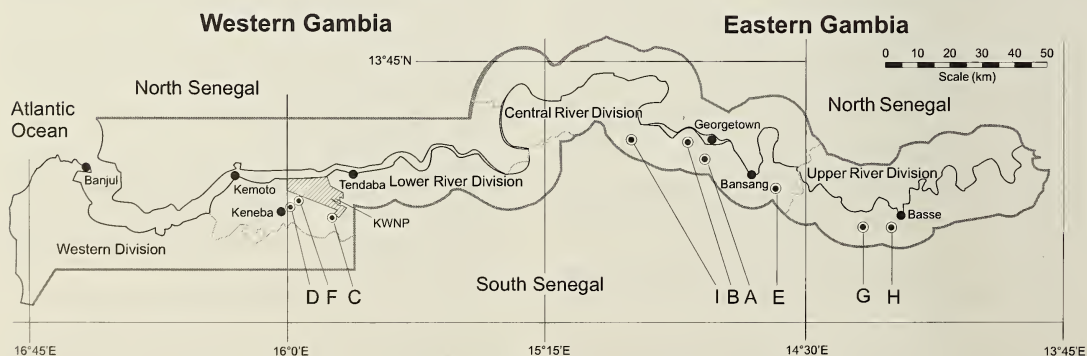


Figure 1. Red-necked Nightjar road-kills in The Gambia (1990–1997)





A



B



D



E



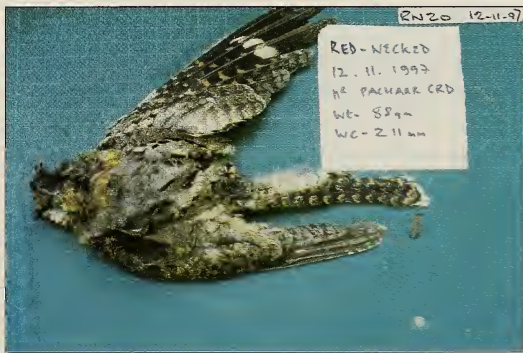
F



G



H



I

Red-necked Nightjar *Caprimulgus ruficollis* specimens from The Gambia. (Clive R. Barlow).



Table 1. Details of Red-necked Nightjar *Caprimulgus ruficollis* road-kills in The Gambia

| Specimen | Date             | Div | Grid Reference                           | WC (mm) | Wt (g) | Notes  |
|----------|------------------|-----|--|---------|--------|--|
| A        | 14 November 1990 | CRD | 14°45'E 13°33'N<br>near Georgetown       | 204     | -      | Wing-spots buffy.<br>Skin at BMNH, Tring                             |
| B        | 31 October 1996  | CRD | 14°50'E 13°36'N<br>288 km east of Banjul | 203     | -      | Wing-spots buffy. No white<br>outertail-tips. Tail 165 mm. Skin.     |
| C        | 23 November 1996 | LRD | 15°50'E 13°20'N<br>145 km east of Banjul | -       | -      | Skin stolen by cat   |
| D        | 23 November 1996 | LRD | 15°59'E 13°20'N<br>near Keneba           | 205     | -      | Wing-spots white. Tail 156 mm.<br>White outertail-tips 28 mm. Skin.  |
| E        | 22 December 1996 | CRD | 14°33'E 13°20'N<br>near Bansang          | 201     | -      | Wing-spots off white. No white<br>outertail-tips. Tail 154 mm. Skin. |
| F        | 21 January 1997  | LRD | 15°58'E 13°20'N<br>near Jali             | 196     | 78     | Wing-spots off-white.<br>Partial skin.                               |
| G        | 11 November 1997 | URD | 14°23'E 13°16'N<br>20 km west of Basse   | 208     | 85     | Wing-spots white.<br>Wings only.                                     |
| H        | 11 November 1997 | URD | 14°22'E 13°18'N<br>near Sotuma Samba Foy | 210     | 89     | Wing-spots off-white.<br>White outertail-tips 30 mm. Skeleton.       |
| I        | 12 November 1997 | CRD | 14°58'E 13°33'N<br>near Jakhaly-Pacharr  | 211     | 88     | Wing-spots buffy.<br>Skeleton.                                       |

Abbreviations: BMNH = British Museum (Natural History), Tring; CRD = Central River Division; LRD = Lower River Division; URD = Upper River Division; Div = Division; KWNP = Kiang West National Park; WC = wing-chord

all of the Gambian records are considered to be of the nominate race. Weights, where given, include the specimen with a full and packed, thus heavy, stomach. There were no obvious gonadal developments in any birds dissected.

## Discussion

Red-necked Nightjar is a candidate for treatment as a threatened species<sup>3</sup>, but has not been subsequently listed as such<sup>2</sup>. There are few passage observations south of the breeding range and its winter ecology is almost unknown; the main breeding areas of the nominate race are Spain and Portugal<sup>1</sup>. Systematic nocturnal survey work from mid-October–mid-November in the eastern districts of The Gambia is recommended in order to quantify Red-necked Nightjar movement through the country. This period coincides with the post-rain season peak of insect abundance. During this period considerable numbers of Standard-winged Nightjar *Macrodipteryx longipennis climacurus* are also killed on roads and smaller numbers of Long-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus climacurus* are also found. Of the ten species of nightjar recorded in Senegambia<sup>1</sup>, only European Nightjar *C. europaeus* is likely to be confused with Red-necked Nightjar. In the period under discussion, no records of European Nightjar have been con-


firmed in The Gambia. Similarly, despite occasional brief observations of large nightjars, no live records of Red-necked Nightjar have been confirmed.

In the future we should like to co-operate with individuals or institutions interested in identifying the stomach contents of road-killed nightjars in The Gambia. The dried insects can be posted to the UK address below.

With the co-operation of The Director of The Department of Parks Management and Wildlife of The Government of The Gambia, specimens B–I have been donated to The University of Michigan, Museum of Zoology, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109-1079, USA.

## Acknowledgements

We thank Prof. Robert B Payne for comments on the first draft of the manuscript and who, with L Payne, taught CRB constructive work with road-killed birds. Dr Tim Wachter and Dr Bakary Touray collected and identified the first Red-necked Nightjar in The Gambia. Paul Murphy at The Department of Parks and Wildlife Management supported the formation of The Gambia Nightjar Co-ordination Project. Nigel Cleere aged and subspecifically identified Specimen A. The following generously deposited slides and prints with us: Peter Allen, Adriaan & Syske Dijkzen, John V Hook, Fred Rowe. John Ovenden edited and circu-

lated Hi-8 video footage of several of the specimens. We are most grateful to the many birders and drivers travelling with us on organised tours for their patience whilst we collected nightjars and other road-killed birds. 

## References

1. Barlow, C., Wachter, T. and Disley, T. 1997. *A Field Guide to Birds of The Gambia and Senegal*. Robertsbridge: Pica Press.
2. Collar, N.J. and Stuart, S.N. 1985. *Threatened birds of Africa and related islands*. Cambridge, UK: International Council for Bird Preservation.
3. Collar, N.J., Crosby, M.J. and Stattersfield, A.J. 1994. *Birds to watch 2: the world list of threatened birds*. Cambridge, UK: BirdLife International.
4. Cramp, S. (ed.) 1989. *The Birds of the Western Palearctic*. Vol 4. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
5. Fry, C.H., Keith, S. and Urban, E.K. (eds) 1988. *The*

- Birds of Africa*. Vol 3. London, UK: Academic Press.
6. Grimes, L.G. 1987. *The Birds of Ghana: an annotated check-list*. BOU Checklist No. 9. Tring: British Ornithologists' Union.
  7. Morel, G.J. and Morel, H.-Y. 1990. *Les oiseaux de Sénégalie. Notices et cartes de distribution*. Paris: ORSTOM.
  8. Rodwell, S.P., Sauvage, A., Rumsey, S.J.R. and Braunlich, A. 1996. An annotated check-list of birds occurring at the Parc National des Oiseaux du Djoudj in Senegal, 1984-1994. *Malimbus* 18: 74-111.
  9. Salewski, V. 1997. Notes on some bird species from Comoé National Park Ivory Coast. *Malimbus* 19: 61-67.
  10. Thiollay, J.M. 1985. The birds of Ivory Coast: status and distribution. *Malimbus* 7: 1-59.

c/o Gambia Nightjar Co-ordination Project, Hindhead Chase, Crossways Road, Graysbott, Hindhead, Surrey, GU26 6HF, UK.



Return Fares From (Prices shown include pre-paid airport tax)

|                  |      |                  |      |                  |      |
|------------------|------|------------------|------|------------------|------|
| Nairobi .....    | £293 | Morocco .....    | £207 | Douala .....     | £554 |
| Banjul .....     | £159 | Jo burg .....    | £226 | Seychelles ..... | £475 |
| Tunisia .....    | £159 | Lagos .....      | £351 | Harare .....     | £427 |
| Libreville ..... | £697 | Addis Ababa..... | £463 | Israel .....     | £163 |
| Mauritius .....  | £535 | Windhoek .....   | £226 | Madagascar.....  | £586 |
| Dakar.....       | £451 | Entebbe .....    | £414 |                  |      |

**WILDWINGS**  
Flights Worldwide

**Tel 0117 984 8040 Fax 0117 9610 200**

### Tours & Holidays 1999

Cameroon - 28-March - 18 April 1999 from £2199

Senegal - 23-31 October 1999 from £tba

**CALL THE BROCHURE LINE NOW : 0117 9610 874**

International House Bank Road Kingswood Bristol BS15 8LX UK



•Discount Flights• Car Hire• Accommodation•Travel Insurance •  
Package Holidays•Sea Travel• Groups & Expeditions Worldwide•  
•Space Travel•

